

THE
COUNTRY SPECTATOR.

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Vetustum
Servitium, semperque novum. CLAUD.

'Tis slavery still, though varying oft its form.

MR. COUNTRY SPECTATOR,

AFTER the long interval, which has elapsed since my last letter, many of your Readers will, probably, have forgotten the narrative of *Mutabilis*. I have already appeared before them in the several characters of an Undergraduate at the University, a Curate in a Country village, a Lecturer in *London*, and a Travelling Tutor. At the time of my return to *England* from my tour, I was in my thirtieth year; yet my loco-motive propensities still acted with all their force: my constant amusement

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was to pore over a map, which gave me the idea of a change of place, and no music was so delightful to my ear as the rattling of a Post-Chaise.

HAVING waited some time, to no purpose, in the hope of employment, I accepted the appointment of an Assistant at a large Free-school in *Kent*. This was my first attempt at the business of education; and what can be more pleasant in the theory? But experience will convince all, who need conviction, that "to rear the tender thought and teach the young idea how to shoot," is not, at least in a Free-school, a very "delightful task." I soon found that my Ushership entitled me to little or no respect, either among the scholars or the inhabitants of the town: and the efforts, which I made to raise my importance, served only to subject me to ridicule and contempt: for how was it possible for an *Usher* to be a gentleman? But the want of respect I could easily have endured: the want of ease and of every comfort was a far weightier evil. The hours of confinement were no less than ten in the day: and almost the whole burthen of teaching fell upon myself. The Master, being a Clergyman without preferment, ingeniously contrived to make a benefice of his school. It was his custom to hear the boys their first lesson on the *Monday* morning, and thus to conclude his labours for the week. Out of the endowment, which was two hundred and fifty pounds annually, he regularly paid me the odd fifty

pounds, for being (what he called with great accuracy of language) his *Assisant*.

THE Mastership was in the gift of one of the Companies in *London*: and it had generally been their practice to appoint the Usher to fill the vacancy. This was a piece of intelligence, which my employer took especial care to have me acquainted with. He repeatedly reminded me, "that he was sinking apace into the vale of years, and that I was a healthy young man, who might reasonably expect to survive him: that the character he had given of me to the Trustees, would infallibly ensure my election: and that he thought my prospect, if I persevered in my undertaking, highly flattering and desirable." All this rhetoric went only to prove, that he was very well satisfied with his Usher; but as the satisfaction was not reciprocal, at the expiration of two years from my original engagement with him, I retired from his service.

SCARCELY had I been settled in another situation, when my late employer actually died: and to my great mortification I heard of my successor's promotion to the vacant place after a service of a very few months. Repentance for having resigned my post, however vain, was imbibited with the reflection, that I had changed my condition not at all for the better, and I have sometimes thought for the worse. I was once more in a Curacy; but a very different

one from that, in which I had embarked at my departure from College. It was the Curacy of a market-town in *Yorkshire*, containing five or six thousand inhabitants. How I came to accept it, I now scarcely recollect: my acceptance of it, however, forms an epoch in my history, as it opened to me a scene of life altogether new.

At my entering on my office I found, that I was little indebted to my predecessors for any advantages, which I was to enjoy. It had frequently been the policy of the Rector to take into his Church such men, as would be most likely to submit to drudgery without repining or reluctance; men of un aspiring hopes and confined prospects, and who felt not the generous pride inseparable from liberal education. The Curacy, therefore, was considered, as it well might be, a very mean employment; not, indeed, so low, as to be incapable of exaltation and to entail certain discredit on all, who should undertake it, but in some measure dependant on the conduct of the Curate. After this statement, it may subject me to the charge of vanity, to inform you that I gradually rose into the esteem of the inhabitants, and, at length, was treated with a degree of respect scarcely inferior to that, which was the portion of the Rector himself: yet the obligations of truth and gratitude are too binding to be violated on any consideration whatever. The Parishioners, for the most part, were people in business; I do not mean petty

tradesmen, but extensive merchants, or men who speculated largely in their several concerns. Their hospitality was such, as I have not experienced elsewhere, either before or since. Their entertainments were frequent, and their manners friendly. Their refinement was in that middle state, which is equally removed from the gross familiarity of my *Worcestershire* friends, and from the flimsy intercourse of fashionable life. This was the general character of the people, from whom I received repeated proofs of real friendship, and instances of attachment, which will ever hold a place in my remembrance.

SUCH were the agreeable circumstances in my condition: and had all other parts of it corresponded with these, I should, probably, have remained in it to the present day, or, at least, I should not have quitted it with disgust. The drudgery of the Parish duty, almost all of which fell to the lot of the Curate, was so great as to be to any man given to reading and study, nearly intolerable. There were Prayers once every day throughout the year, and very frequently twice: and the occasional duty, which in so large a parish must always be oppressive, had received an additional weight from the pusillanimity or thoughtless compliance of my predecessors. In this place it had become the business of the Curate to run all over the town at the call of any idle gossip for the

purpose of giving children *private baptism*. For this class of visits no hour was deemed unseasonable and no weather unpleasant: at noon or midnight, in the sunshine or during a storm the demand was made indiscriminately, and was urged in the peremptory language of compulsion, tho' the urgency of the case was never certified and not always pleaded. Against a practice so directly contrary to the order of the Church, so different from the custom generally established, so utterly destructive of the comfort of the Minister, and altogether so needless in the neighbourhood of a Church, at first I made a spirited remonstrance: but being at length weary of repeating old arguments and exposing the same absurdities, I gave up the contest, and determined to bear every burthen, which might be imposed on me, in the hope that the term of my hardships would be short: *spe finis dura ferentem*. I wished, indeed, to merit the thanks of my successor by making his employment less laborious than I had found it: but rights once established are not easily laid aside, and bigotry will always quote precedents in the support of error.

THIS Cure I had very early determined to resign, as soon as I could do it without appearing to be fickle: I retained it, therefore, fifteen months; nor were the smiles of the Corporation, who were the patrons of the living, a sufficiently powerful inducement with me to alter my resolution. Ac-

cordingly I took a house in the neighbourhood with the view of being employed in private tuition. After waiting a year, in which time two young gentlemen only were offered to me for instruction, I thought the prospect of success very unpromising, and resolved no longer to be the sport of caprice or vulgar criticism, but to accept the first easy Curacy, which might present itself. This happened to be situated in the fens of *Lincolnshire*, from which place my narrative is written. Scarcely had I come hither, when several letters arrived from gentlemen, who were desirous of placing their sons under my care: but my scheme of life was altered, and their proposals arrived too late. In my present situation there is little to raise my admiration or delight. I have an eye capable of deriving pleasure from the beauties of Nature; but here, wherever I look, I see nothing during half the year but an extended plain of waters: I am not averse to social intercourse; but here I am doomed to uninterrupted solitude. Wearied, however, with disappointment and the restlessness of change, I have given up the *pursuit of Happiness*, and will content myself with *intercepting* her as she may come into my way. In this place I have now resided forty months, and am in my thirty-eighth year. Thus am I struggling with the difficulties of life, when I ought to be enjoying its comforts.

How dangerous a propensity is the love of

change! In almost every situation, into which Fortune has thrown me, I might by patience and perseverance have acquired a competency: but like the eager husbandman, I have never waited, till the fruits of my labour have attained maturity, but have pronounced the soil barren, which has not been immediately productive.

I am, Sir, &c.

Lincolnshire.

Mutabilis.

April. 1793.

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To a Correspondent.

IF TIMOTHY STAY will wait a while, his letter shall make its appearance in some *shape* or other: its *present* shape, like that which he condemns, is not wholly unexceptionable.